



**Texas Department of State  
Health Services**



May 24, 2017

School Superintendents and School Board Members:

Thank you for your commitment to the education of school children in Texas. We know the impact of school districts extends well beyond the walls of school campuses and into the communities they serve. As the school year draws to a close, mosquito season is just beginning. As hubs of your community, we are asking for your help in raising awareness of ways to prevent the spread of Zika. Protecting your campuses will help protect your staff, students, their families and the entire community.

Zika is primarily spread to people through mosquito bites (*Aedes aegypti species*). As the weather warms and mosquito activity increases, we expect the threat of local mosquito transmission of Zika to resume and persist. Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and local health departments ask your help in promoting important messages to prevent local mosquito transmission of Zika and protect your students, families and communities.

Pregnant women are particularly at risk due to the Zika virus' ability to cause birth defects in unborn infants. We must take particular care to ensure that young women, their families, and their communities are educated on steps that they can take to prevent the spread of Zika. The public health measures we take together will help prevent serious health impacts on the next generation of Texans.

Texans can take these simple steps to prevent Zika transmission:

- Apply EPA-approved insect repellent when planning to be outdoors.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and wear long pants when outdoors for prolonged periods.
- Utilize screens or close windows and doors.
- Regularly remove any standing water in and around your home or school that could provide a breeding ground for mosquitoes.
- Cover trash cans or containers that may collect water.
- Visit your doctor if you suspect you've been exposed to Zika or exhibit any of the symptoms of Zika, which may include fever, rash, joint pain, and red eyes.

Combating Zika begins at the local level. When done in concert, these simple steps represent a big step toward preventing the spread of Zika.

For your convenience, we have enclosed flyers that identify the steps outlined above. Disseminating these flyers to your school children as the school year draws to an end provides an easy method for educating your community, and ensuring that together we can prevent the spread of Zika.

DSHS' website dedicated to Zika ([www.TexasZika.org](http://www.TexasZika.org)) has a variety of other free information and materials in English and Spanish available for download and order. A Zika communications toolkit for organizations interested in sharing important information with their stakeholders, including employees, school-aged children and their families features newsletter copy, social media content, and more. The website also includes website banners and other shareable graphics; we ask you to please post and share these images on your ISD and school websites and social media platforms.

We encourage all schools and communities to take action now to address the threat of Zika virus in Texas. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us or your local health department as we work to limit locally transmitted cases of Zika in Texas. DSHS stands ready to provide technical expertise as you prepare school campuses for the summer months. Please feel free to send any questions to [TexasZika@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:TexasZika@dshs.texas.gov).

Thank you for your assistance in this important public health matter.

Sincerely,



Greg Abbott  
Governor



John Hellerstedt, M.D.  
Commissioner, DSHS



Mike Morath  
Commissioner, TEA

## **Zika Virus Protection and Prevention**

### **Measures for Individuals to Protect Themselves from Mosquito Bites**

- wear insect repellent,
- cover up with long-sleeved shirts and long pants,
- keep mosquitoes out with air conditioning or intact window screens, and
- limit outdoor activities during peak mosquito times.

### **Measures for Individuals to Prevent Mosquito Breeding**

- At least weekly, carefully check the area around your home, school or workplace for mosquito breeding areas:
  - clear and empty gutters;
  - empty or get rid of cans, buckets, old tires, pots, plant saucers and other containers that hold water;
  - remove standing water around structures and from flat roofs;
  - change water in pet dishes daily;
  - rinse and scrub vases and other indoor water containers weekly;
  - change water in wading pools and bird baths several times a week;
  - maintain backyard pools or hot tubs;
  - cover trash containers;
  - water lawns and gardens carefully so water does not stand for several days;
  - screen rain barrels and openings to water tanks or cisterns; and
  - treat front and back door areas of homes with residual insecticides if mosquitoes are abundant nearby.
- If mosquito problems persist, consider pesticide applications for vegetation around the home.

### **Measures to Protect Communities from Zika Virus**

- conduct neighborhood outreach about active precautions individuals can take to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites;
- initiate or enhance monitoring and surveillance of mosquito activity;
- develop a local contingency plan for mosquito abatement and surveillance, and plan for additional control measures if needed;
- keep public drains and ditches clear of weeds and trash so water will not collect;
- implement efforts to clean up illegal dump sites and collect heavy trash; and
- encourage people to report illegal dumpsites and standing water, and respond quickly to these complaints.

### **TexasZika.org Communications Resources**

- Zika Communications Toolkit:  
<http://www.texaszika.org/docs/TexasDSHSZikaCommunicationsToolkitII.pdf>
- Sharable graphics for social media: <http://www.texaszika.org/materials.htm#toolkit>
- Fact sheets and posters: <http://texaszika.org/materials.htm>